GERMINATION OF SEED AND CARE OF SEEDLINGS - Harry Goulding

Pursuing the efforts of the hybridizing committee to assist you in the miracle of creating your new hibiscus we are very conscious of the difficulties facing most amateurs in bringing your precious seed to maturity.

Concisely we enumerate: sterile growing media, drainage, light and sunshine, seed cutting, containers, watering, and fertilizer, for your special attention.

Your first consideration is the growing media which should be uniformly coarse, free of disease organisms, and provide good aeration and drainage. We strongly suggest that you obtain from your fertilizer dealer a Peat-Lite mix which is composed of equal parts of shreded spagnum peat and vermiculite. Basically this mixture is known as the Cornell Mix, developed at Cornell University in 1964, and is now sold universally to the bedding plant trade under various brand names such as Jiffy-Mix and Vermi-Peat-Mix. (We are advising all chapter presidents of the nearest suppliers.) Next, mix thoroughly this Peat-Lite with one-half part by volume of Perlite for additional drainage, making a three-way mix.

We advise planting each seed in a small separate container. Two-inch square peat pots are ideal. Obtain or improvise some type of shallow tray to hold the pots, like the wooden bottled-drink flats, for example. Place in the botton of the flat about one inch of some coarse aggregate such as Perlite, fine beach shell, or small rock, as a base to insure good drainage. Fill your small pots level with the media, tap lightly to settle mix, but do not pack, and arrange pots in the flat.

To further reduce incidence of damping-off disease, which could attack the tender base of your seedlings, we especially recommend coarse, white builders-sand from your lumber dealer for a seed covering material. A pan or gallon can of this coarse sand should be baked in the oven at low temperature, about 250°F.,

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for 2 to 3 hours, to give positive sterility.

You are now ready for planting. Wash hands, do not smoke while handling seed. Bring out your records and tag each pot by seed number as they are planted. Owing to the hard hull on hibiscus seed, it is troublesome, but absolutely essential to safe and quick germination, that the seed hull be nicked. Close examination will show that a seed resembles a tiny human head, broad at one end. At this rounded end nick the seed shell. Use a small, very sharp knife. Try to flick out just the outer shell, but do not be alarmed if you apparently cut too deep as only the seedling leaves, called cotyledons, are folded in this end of the seed. Now, using a teaspoon, press about a one-half inch indenture into the center of the filled pots. Lay in one of the nicked seeds and cover with sand to level. The porous sand will not mat together or hold excessive moisture for fungi, and seedlings will have no trouble pushing through as they do, for example, with ground spagnum.

At this point your seeds are ready for watering, and we assume that all your mix, pots, sand, etc., have been worked in a dry condition, as this is easiest. If available to you, place the flats for about 12 hours under your mist system. If not, the next best way to water is from the bottom, placing the flats in a larger container of water so that they wet by capillary action. When thoroughly wet, you may cover the flats with plastic or newspaper. If you do not cover, possibly small amounts of water may need to be added about every third day in the center of the pots to keep sand around the seed from drying out completely.

Your seed will begin to sprout, if nicked, on the 6th or 7th day, so watch closely and remove covering. All should be up in about 14 days. Approximately 80% of the seeds planted will sprout. It is very essential that your plants receive intense light from first emergence. Morning sun will not harm, but help to

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